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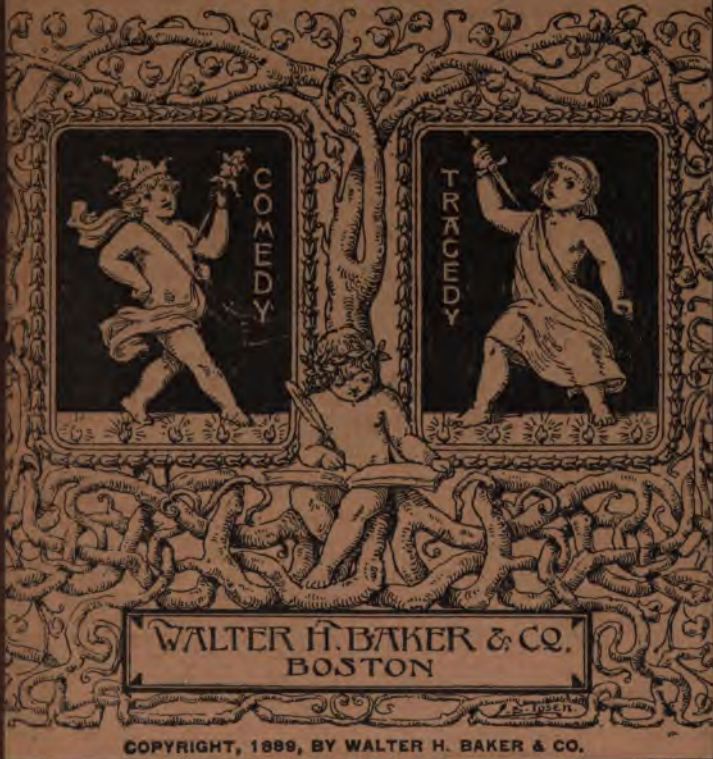
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The Land of Heart's
Desire

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he Land of Heart's Desire

By W. B. YEATS

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The Land of Heart's Desire

CHARACTERS

MAURTEEN BRUIN, *a peasant.*

SHAWN BRUIN, *his son.*

FATHER HART, *a priest.*

BRIDGET BRUIN, *Maurteen's wife.*

MAIRE BRUIN, *their daughter-in-law.*

A CHILD.



NOVEL COLLECTION
VOLUME 100

130630

The Land of Heart's Desire

SCENE.—*The kitchen of MAURTEEN BRUIN's house. An open grate with a turf fire is at the left side of the room, with a table in front of it. There is a door leading to the open air at the back, and another door a little to its left, leading to an inner room. There is a window, a settle and a large dresser on the right side of the room, and a great bowl of primroses on the sill of the window. MAURTEEN BRUIN, FATHER HART, and BRIDGET BRUIN are sitting at the table. SHAWN BRUIN is setting the table for supper. MAIRE BRUIN sits on the settle reading a yellow manuscript.*

BRIDGET.

Because I bade her go and feed the calves,
She took that old book down out of the thatch
And has been doubled over it all day.
We would be deafened by her groans and moans
Had she to work as some do, Father Hart,
Get up at dawn like me, and mend and scour ;
Or ride abroad in the boisterous night like you,
The pyx and blessed bread under your arm.

SHAWN.

You are too cross.

BRIDG.

The young side with the young.



MAURTEEN.

quarrels with my wife a bit at times,
It is too deep just now in the old book !
do not blame her greatly ; she will grow
quiet as a puff-ball in a tree
I but the moons of marriage dawn and die
half a score of times.

MAUR.

Persuade the colleen to put by the book :
 My grandfather would mutter just such things,
 And he was no judge of a dog or horse,
 And any idle boy could blarney him :
 Just speak your mind.

FATHER.

Put it away, my colleen.
 God spreads the heavens above us like great wings,
 And gives a little round of deeds and days,
 And then come the wrecked angels and set snares,
 And bait them with light hopes and heavy dreams,
 Until the heart is puffed with pride and goes,
 Half shuddering and half joyous, from God's peace :
 And it was some wrecked angel, blind from tears,
 Who flattered Adene's heart with merry words.
 My colleen, I have seen some other girls
 Restless and ill at ease, but years went by
 And they grew like their neighbors and were glad
 In minding children, working at the churn,
 And gossiping of weddings and of wakes ;
 For life moves out of a red flare of dreams
 Into a common light of common hours,
 Until old age brings the red flare again.

SHAWN.

Yet do not blame her greatly, Father Hart,
 For she is dull while I am in the fields,
 And mother's tongue were harder still to bear,
 But for her fancies : this is May Eve too,
 When the good people post about the world,
 And surely one may think of them to-night.
 Maire, have you the primroses to fling
 Before the door to make a golden path
 For them to bring good luck into the house ?
 Remember, they may steal new-married brides
 After the fall of twilight on May Eve.

MAIRE *goes over to the window and takes flowers from the bowl and strews them outside the door.*)

FATHER.

You do well, daughter, because God permits
 Great power to the good people on May Eve.

SHAWN.

They can work all their will with primroses ;
Change them to golden money, or little flames
To burn up those who do them any wrong.

MAIRE (*in a dreamy voice*).

I had no sooner flung them by the door
Than the wind cried and hurried them away ;
And then a child came running in the wind
And caught them in her hands and fondled them :
Her dress was green : her hair was of red gold ;
Her face was pale as water before dawn.

FATHER.

Whose child can this be ?

MAUR.

No one's child at all.

She often dreams that some one has gone by
When there was nothing but a puff of wind.

MAIRE.

They will not bring good luck into the house,
For they have blown the primroses away ;
Yet I am glad that I was courteous to them,
For are not they, likewise, children of God ?

FATHER.

Colleen, they are the children of the ^{blind} field,
And they have power until the end of Time,
When God shall fight with them a great pitched battle
And hack them into pieces.

MAIRE.

He will smile,

Father, perhaps, and open his great door,
And call the pretty and kind into his house.

FATHER.

Did but the lawless angels see that door,
They would fall, slain by everlasting peace ;
And when such angels knock upon our doors
Who goes with them must drive through the same storm

(A knock at the door. MAIRE opens it and then goes to the dresser and fills a porringer with milk and hands it through the door and takes it back empty and closes the door.)

MAIRE.

A little queer old woman cloaked in green,
Who came to beg a porringer of milk.

BRIDG.

The good people go asking milk and fire
Upon May Eve—Woe on the house that gives,
For they have power upon it for a year.
I knew you would bring evil on the house.

MAUR.

Who was she?

MAIRE.

Both the tongue and face were strange.

MAUR.

Some strangers came last week to Clover Hill ;
She must be one of them.

BRIDG.

I am afraid.

MAUR.

The priest will keep all harm out of the house.

FATHER.

The cross will keep all harm out of the house
While it hangs there.

MAUR.

Come, sit beside me, colleen,
And put away your dreams of discontent,
For I would have you light up my last days
Like a bright torch of pine, and when I die
I will make you the wealthiest hereabout :
For hid away where nobody can find
I have a stocking full of silver and gold.

BRIDG.

You are the fool of every pretty face,
And I must pinch and pare that my son's wife
May have all kinds of ribbons for her head.

MAUR.

Do not be cross ; she is a right good girl !
 The butter is by your elbow, Father Hart.
 My colleen, have not Fate and Time and Change
 Done well for me and for old Bridget there ?
 We have a hundred acres of good land,
 And sit beside each other at the fire,
 The wise priest of our parish to our right,
 And you and our dear son to left of us.
 To sit beside the board and drink good wine
 And watch the turf smoke coiling from the fire
 And feel content and wisdom in your heart,
 This is the best of life ; when we are young
 We long to tread a way none trod before,
 But find the excellent old way through love
 And through the care of children to the hour
 For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.

(A knock at the door. MAIRE opens it and then takes a sod of turf out of the hearth in the tongs and passes it through the door and closes the door and remains standing by it.)

MAIRE.

A little queer old man in a green coat,
 Who asked a burning sod to light his pipe.

BRIDG.

You have now given milk and fire, and brought,
 For all you know, evil upon the house.
 Before you married you were idle and fine,
 And went about with ribbons on your head ;
 And now you are a good-for-nothing wife.

SHAWN.

Be quiet, mother !

MAUR.

You are much too cross !

MAIRE.

What do I care if I have given this house,
 Where I must hear all day a bitter tongue,
 Into the power of faeries !

BRIDG.

You know well
 How calling the good people by that name

Or talking of them over much at all
May bring all kinds of evil on the house.

MAIRE.

Come, faeries, take me out of this dull house !
Let me have all the freedom I have lost ;
Work when I will and idle when I will !
Faeries, come take me out of this dull world,
For I would ride with you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the disheveled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame !

FATHER.

You cannot know the meaning of your words.

MAIRE.

Father, I am right weary of four tongues :
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,
And a kind tongue too full of drowsy love,
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

(SHAWN comes over to her and leads her to the settle.)

SHAWN.

Do not blame me : I often lie awake
Thinking that all things trouble your bright head —
How beautiful it is—such broad pale brows
Under a cloudy blossoming of hair !
Sit down beside me here—these are too old,
And have forgotten they were ever young.

MAIRE.

O you are the great door-post of this house,
And I, the red nasturtium, climbing up.

(She takes SHAWN'S hand, but looks shyly at the priest and lets it go.)

FATHER.

Good daughter, take his hand—by love alone
God binds us to himself and to the hearth
And shuts us from the waste beyond his peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

SHAWN.

Would that the world were mine to give it you
With every quiet hearth and barren waste,
The maddening freedom of its woods and tides,
And the bewildering light upon its hills.

MAIRE.

Then I would take and break it in my hands
To see you smile watching it crumble away.

SHAWN.

Then I would mould a world of fire and dew
With no one bitter, grave, or over wise,
And nothing marred or old to do you wrong.
And crowd the enraptured quiet of the sky
With candles burning to your lonely face.

MAIRE.

Your looks are all the candles that I need.

SHAWN.

Once a fly dancing in a beam of the sun
Or the light wind blowing out of the dawn,
Could fill your heart with dreams none other knew,
But now the indissoluble sacrament
Has mixed your heart that was most proud and cold
With my warm heart forever; and sun and moon
Must fade and heaven be rolled up like a scroll;
But your white spirit still walk by my spirit.

(A VOICE *sings in the distance.*)

MAIRE.

Did you hear something call? O guard me close,
Because I have said wicked things to-night;
And seen a pale-faced child with red-gold hair,
And longed to dance upon the winds with her.

A VOICE (*close to the door*).

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart
And the lonely of heart is withered away,
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air;

For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing
 Of a land where even the old are fair,
 And even the wise are merry of tongue ;
 But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
 " When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
 The lonely of heart is withered away ! "

MAUR.

I am right happy, and would make all else
 Be happy too. I hear a child outside,
 And will go bring her in out of the cold.

*(He opens the door. A CHILD dressed in pale green and
 with red-gold hair comes into the house.)*

CHILD.

I tire of winds and waters and pale lights

MAUR.

You are most welcome. It is cold out there ;
 Who would think to face such cold on a May Eve ?

CHILD.

And when I tire of this warm little house
 There is one here who must away, away,
 To where the woods, the stars, and the white streams
 Are holding a continual festival.

MAUR.

O listen to her dreamy and strange talk.
 Come to the fire.

CHILD.

I will sit upon your knee,
 For I have run from where the winds are born,
 And long to rest my feet a little while.

(She sits upon his knee.)

BRIDG.

How pretty you are !

MAUR.

Your hair is wet with dew !

BRIDG.

I will warm your chilly feet.



(She takes the child's feet in her hands.)

MAUR.

You must have come
A long, long way, for I have never seen
Your pretty face, and must be tired and hungry ;
Here is some bread and wine.

CHILD.

The wine is bitter.
Old mother, have you no sweet food for me ?

BRIDG.

I have some honey !

(She goes into the next room.)

MAUR.

You are a dear child ;
The mother was quite cross before you came.

(BRIDG. returns with the honey, and goes to the dresser and fills a porringer with milk.)

BRIDG.

She is the child of gentle people ; look
At her white hands and at her pretty dress.
I have brought you some new milk, but wait a while,
And I will put it by the fire to warm,
For things well fitted for poor folk like us
Would never please a high-born child like you.

CHILD.

Old mother, my old mother, the green dawn
Brightens above while you blow up the fire ;
And evening finds you spreading the white cloth.
The young may lie in bed and dream and hope,
But you work on because your heart is old.

BRIDG.

The young are idle.

CHILD.

Old father, you are wise
And all the years have gathered in your heart
To whisper of the wonders that are gone.

The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,
But you are wise because your heart is old.

MAUR.

O who would think to find so young a child
Loving old age and wisdom?

~~(BRIDG. gives her more bread and honey.)~~

CHILD.

No more, mother.

MAUR.

What a small bite! The milk is ready now;
What a small sip!

CHILD.

Put on my shoes, old mother,
For I would like to dance now I have eaten.
The reeds are dancing by Coolaney lake,
And I would like to dance until the reeds
And the white waves have danced themselves to sleep.

(BRIDG. having put on her shoes, she gets off the old man's knees and is about to dance, but suddenly sees the crucifix and shrieks and covers her eyes.)

What is that ugly thing on the black cross?

FATHER.

You cannot know how naughty your words are!
That is our Blessed Lord!

CHILD.

Hide it away!

BRIDG.

I have begun to be afraid, again!

CHILD.

Hide it away!

MAUR.

That would be wickedness!

BRIDG.

That would be sacrilege!

CHILD.

Hide it away! The tortured thing!

MAUR.

Her parents are to blame.

FATHER.

That is the image of the Son of God.

(The CHILD puts her arm round his neck and kisses him.)

CHILD.

Hide it away! Hide it away!

MAUR.

No! No!

FATHER.

Because you are so young and little a child
I will go take it down.

CHILD.

Hide it away,
And cover it out of sight and out of mind.

(FATHER takes it down and carries it toward the inner room.)

FATHER.

Since you have come into this barony
I will instruct you in our blessed faith:
Being a clever child you will soon learn.

(To the others.)

We must be tender with all budding things.
Our Maker let no thought of Calvary
Trouble the morning stars in their first song.

(Puts the crucifix in the inner room.)

CHILD.

Here is level ground for dancing. I will dance.
The wind is blowing on the waving reeds,
The wind is blowing on the heart of man.

(She dances, swaying about like the reeds.)

MAIRE (*to SHAWN*).

Just now when she came near I thought I heard
Other small steps beating upon the floor,
And a faint music blowing in the wind,
Invisible pipes giving her feet the time.

SHAWN.

I heard no step but hers.

MAIRE.

Look to the bolt !
Because the unholy powers are abroad.

MAUR (*to the CHILD*).

Come over here, and if you promise me
Not to talk wickedly of holy things
I will give you something.

CHILD.

Bring it me, old father !

(MAUR. *goes into the next room.*)

FATHER.

I will have queen cakes when you come to me !

(MAUR. *returns and lays a piece of money on the table. The
CHILD makes a gesture of refusal.*)

MAUR.

It will buy lots of toys ; see how it glitters !

CHILD.

Come, tell me, do you love me ?

MAUR.

I love you !

CHILD.

Ah ! but you love this fireside !

FATHER.

I love you.

CHILD.

But you love him above.

BRIDG.

She is blaspheming.

CHILD (*to MAIRE*).
And do you love me?

MAIRE.

I—I do not know.

CHILD.

You love that great tall fellow over there :
Yet I could make you ride upon the winds,
Run on the top of the disheveled tide,
And dance upon the mountains like a flame !

MAIRE.

Queen of the Angels and kind Saints, defend us !
Some dreadful fate has fallen : a while ago
The wind cried out and took the primroses,
And she ran by me laughing in the wind,
And I gave milk and fire, and she came in
And made you hide the blessed crucifix.

FATHER.

You fear because of her wild, pretty prattle ;
She knows no better.

(*To the CHILD.*)

Child, how old are you?

CHILD.

When winter sleep is abroad my hair grows thin,
My feet unsteady. When the leaves awaken
My mother carries me in her golden arms.
I will soon put on my womanhood and marry
The spirits of wood and water, but who can tell
When I was born for the first time? I think
I am much older than the eagle cock
That blinks and blinks on Ballygawly Hill,
And he is the oldest thing under the moon.

FATHER.

She is of the faery people.

CHILD.

I am Brig's daughter.

I sent my messengers for milk and fire.
And then I heard one call to me and came.

(They all except MAIRE gather about the priest for protection. MAIRE stays on the settle in a stupor of terror. The CHILD takes primroses from the great bowl and begins to strew them between herself and the priest and about MAIRE. During the following dialogue SHAWN goes more than once to the brink of the primroses, but shrinks back to the others timidly.)

FATHER.

I will confront this mighty spirit alone.

(They cling to him and hold him back.)

CHILD *(while she strews the primroses).*

No one whose heart is heavy with human tears
Can cross these little cressets of the wood.

FATHER.

Be not afraid, the Father is with us,
And all the nine angelic hierarchies,
The Holy Martyrs and the Innocents,
The adoring Magi in their coats of mail,
And he who died and rose on the third day,
And Mary with her seven times wounded heart.

(The CHILD ceases strewing the primroses, and kneels upon the settle beside MAIRE and puts her arms about her neck.)

Cry, daughter to the Angels and the Saints.

CHILD.

You shall go with me, newly-married bride,
And gaze upon a merrier multitude;
White-armed Nuala and Aengus of the birds,
And Feacra of the hurtling foam, and him
Who is the ruler of the western host,
Finvarra, and their Land of Heart's Desire,
Where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood,
But joy is wisdom, Time an endless song.
I kiss you and the world begins to fade.

FATHER.

Daughter, I call you unto home and love!

CHILD.

Stay, and come with me, newly-married bride,
For, if you hear him, you grow like the rest:

Bear children, cook, be mindful of the churn,
 And wrangle over butter, fowl, and eggs,
 And sit at last there, old and bitter tongue,
 Watching the white stars war upon your hopes.

FATHER.

Daughter, I point you out the way to heaven.

CHILD.

But I can lead you, newly-married bride,
 Where nobody gets old and crafty and wise,
 Where nobody gets old and godly and grave,
 Where nobody gets old and bitter of tongue,
 And where kind tongues bring no captivity,
 For we are only true to the far lights
 We follow singing, over valley and hill.

FATHER.

By the dear name of the one crucified,
 I bid you, Maire Bruin, come to me.

CHILD.

I keep you in the name of your own heart !

(She leaves the settle, and stooping takes up a mass of prim-roses and kisses them.)

We have great power to-night, dear golden folk,
 For he took down and hid the crucifix.
 And my invisible brethren fill the house ;
 I hear their footsteps going up and down.
 O they shall soon rule all the hearts of men
 And own all lands ; last night they merrily danced
 About his chapel belfry ! *(To MAIRE.)* Come away,
 I hear my brethren bidding us away !

FATHER.

I will go fetch the crucifix again.

(They hang about him in terror and prevent him from moving.)

BRIDG.

The enchanted flowers will kill us if you go.

MAUR.

They turn the flowers to little twisted flames.

SHAWN.

The little twisted flames burn up the heart.

CHILD.

I hear them crying, "Newly married bride,
Come to the woods and waters and pale lights."

MAIRE.

I will go with you.

FATHER.

She is lost, alas !

CHILD (*standing by the door*).

But clinging mortal hope must fall from you
For we who ride the winds, run on the waves,
And dance upon the mountains, are more light
Than dewdrops on the banners of the dawn.

MAIRE.

O take me with you.

(*SHAWN goes over to her.*)

SHAWN.

Beloved, do not leave me !
Remember when I met you by the well
And took your hand in mine and spoke of love.

MAIRE.

Dear face ! Dear voice !

CHILD.

Come, newly-married bride !

MAIRE.

I always loved her world—and yet—and yet—

(*Sinks into his arms.*)

CHILD (*from the door*).

White bird, white bird, come with me, little bird.

MAIRE.

She calls to me !

CHILD.

Come with me, little bird !

MAIRE.

I can hear songs and dancing !

SHAWN.

Stay with me.

MAIRE.

I think that I would stay—and yet—and yet—

CHILD.

Come, little bird with crest of gold !

MAIRE (*very softly*).

And yet—

CHILD.

Come, little bird with silver feet !

(MAIRE *dies*, and the child goes.)

SHAWN.

She is dead !

BRIDG.

Come from that image : body and soul are gone,
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves
Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

FATHER.

Thus do the spirits of evil snatch their prey
Almost out of the very hand of God ;
And day by day their power is more and more,
And men and women leave old paths, for pride
Comes knocking with 'thin knuckles on the heart.

A VOICE (*singing outside*).

The wind blows out of the gates of the day,
The wind blows over the lonely of heart
And the lonely of heart is withered away,
While the faeries dance in a place apart,
Shaking their milk-white feet in a ring,
Tossing their milk-white arms in the air ;
For they hear the wind laugh, and murmur and sing
Of a land where even the old are fair,
And even the wise are merry of tongue ;

But I heard a reed of Coolaney say,
“When the wind has laughed and murmured and sung
The lonely of heart is withered away !”

(The song is taken up by many voices, who sing loudly, as if in triumph. Some of the voices seem to come from within the house.)

CURTAIN

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